



MassHabitat Partnership

Sharing the Cost
Sharing the Habitat



LIP is a grant program administered by the Department of the Interior's United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and implemented through state natural resources agencies.

THE ISSUES

Newsletter

Welcome to the second issue of MassHabitat. This newsletter will be distributed annually in the Summer. If you would like to showcase your project or see a specific issue highlighted in the newsletter please contact the LIP Coordinator.

Focus

During the second round of grants our focus continued to be on early successional habitat such as grasslands and scrub/shrub land, shorebird breeding areas, NHESP priority natural communities and areas with Species-at-risk.

Feature Article:

In each newsletter the MassWildlife Landowner Incentive program will highlight a species or habitat of importance. In this issue we have chosen the grasshopper sparrow. Currently, LIP is funding many projects in Massachusetts working on site for the benefit of grassland birds; restoring habitat through the removal of invasive plants and the removal of woody plants to keep the habitat open. Please see page 2 for more information about grasshopper sparrows and their natural habitat in Massachusetts.

Faces of Conservation

In the this years Newsletter we spoke with Kevin Weir. He is currently working under a LIP grant and tells us about his project.

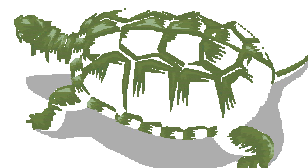
Dates Reminders

This years grant application period will be opened in late October. Please refer to the webpage often for updated application materials and assistance.

LIP's Role in the Massachusetts Wildlife Action Plan

In order to receive federal funds through the State Wildlife Grants program, Congress charged each state and territory with developing a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy (CWCS). These proactive plans will help conserve wildlife and vital natural areas before they become too rare and costly to protect.

As our communities grow, the CWCS will give us the ability to fulfill our responsibility to conserve wildlife and the lands and waters where they live for future generations. (See story on page 3, *Understanding the Wildlife Biodiversity of the Commonwealth*)



Summary of the 2006-2007 Partnership with Private Landowners

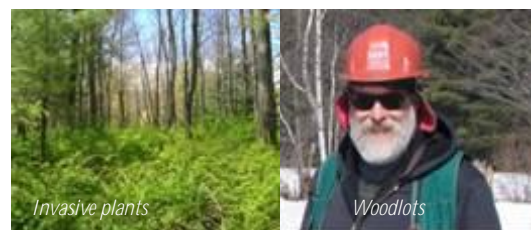
This year MassWildlife's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) received **40** applications for Species-at-risk habitat improvement/restoration on private lands. Of these 40 applications, **37** were selected for funding in FY2007. MassWildlife will be partnering with these private landowners on about **1973**-acres. This will create over 3112-acres of total habitat. Landowner are being reimbursed about **\$845,000** across the state for the habitat work. (*cont. on page 2*)

New Landowner Incentive Program signs

Many of you have asked if we could provide you with a sign which would inform your neighbors and others know about the good work going on with your property. Well they're here.



New Landowner Incentive Program signs are available to landowners participating in the program. Signs, which are approximately 8.5 x 11 inches, are available upon request for posting on participating projects. Interested landowners should contact the LIP Program Coordinator at (508) 792-7270 x113 or visit the Westborough Field Headquarters, at 1 Rabbit Hill Rd, Westborough, MA 01581 to pick them up.



Feature Article on LIP species:

Grasshopper Sparrow



Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*

Habitats: grasslands of at least 30 acres and prefer sites greater than 100 acres

Conservation Concern: State Listed

Species Description

The Grasshopper Sparrow is a small sparrow of open fields. It is 4.5-5.5 inches long, has a flat head which slopes directly into the bill, and has a short, narrow tail. Each feather of the tail tapers to a point, giving it a ragged appearance. The upperparts have reddish streaks which contrast with the intervening gray. The dark brown crown is divided by a thin cream-colored center stripe. A yellowish spot extends from the bill in front of and below the eye. The sexes are similar. The typical song, often mistaken for the song of a grasshopper, consists of two chip notes followed by *tsk tsick tsurrrr*. Breeding birds also sing a complicated song with many squeaky and buzzy notes intermixed in a long phrase.

Distribution and Abundance

There are 32 recent, documented occurrences of the Grasshopper Sparrow in Massachusetts (NHESP database, accessed December, 2004).

Habitat Description

The Grasshopper Sparrow is found in sandplain grasslands, pastures, hayfields and airfields characterized by clumping grass species (rather than sod-forming grasses). It is also found on open knolls, on sandplains within pine barrens, and in coastal heathlands. It requires a patchy grassland habitat with bare ground and bunch grasses such as poverty grass (*Danthonia spicata*), bluestem (*Andropogon* spp.) and fescue (*Festuca* spp). Preferred habitat is characterized by relatively low stem densities and limited accumulation of ground litter. This species is generally absent from fields with over 35% cover in shrubs. Bare ground is especially important, as Grasshopper Sparrows behave much like field mice in their habit of running along the ground to escape predators and to forage for invertebrates.

Threats

Loss of appropriate habitat to land development, changes in agricultural practices (early harvesting and fewer fallow fields), and natural succession appear to be the primary factors in this species' decline. Openings created by forest fires once provided habitat, but these are now rare.

Other species benefiting from Habitat Restoration

The funding of grassland habitat restoration in Massachusetts will not only help state listed Grasshopper sparrows, but other wildlife as well. Wildlife such as the Wood turtle, American burying beetle, Frosted Elfin and other butterflies as well as other birds such as Woodcock, Short-eared Owls, bobolinks and other grassland birds will also benefit from management activities. A mixture of herbaceous plants including native grasses, like little bluestem, and other forbs and ericads would also benefit.



Please look for this years LIP Grant announcement in late October

www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/dfw_lip.htm

2007-08 Funding

All of the funding that landowners are competing for comes from an appropriation by Congress. It is given to the USFWS to be administered to all the states. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service releases its Request For Proposals for federal fiscal year 2007 state grant proposals in March.

Approximately only \$10 million will be available to states, on a competitive basis, for LIP projects for the 2007-08 fiscal year. That number has been cut \$14.4 million from the original President's budget request and \$11.7 million less than last years budget. Needless to say next year will be a competitive year. While no date has been set by USFWS for the official announcement of state awards, the process in previous years indicates the announcement probably will come in the spring of 2007. Please let folks know about your projects and support LIP so that we can continue to fund great projects like we have in the past.

2006-07 LIP Preview: (continued from the front page)

- Of the 37 projects selected: **12 land trusts**, **5 conservation organizations**, **3 sportsmen's club** and **17 other private landowners**.
- Of the 37 projects: **1077 acres** in *coastal habitats*, **710.5 acres** in *early successional upland*, **195 acres** in *early successional wetlands*, **937.3 acres** in *grasslands* and **11.8 acres** in *Pitch pine-Scrub oak forest*.
- Of the projects selected: **78%** of the projects had *permanent protection*, **16%** were enrolled in *Chapter 61* and **5%** had *no conservation protection*. The projects without land protection were required to sign a land covenant for **10 years** requiring the landowner to keep the project area as wildlife habitat.
- Of the projects selected: **100%** applied for manual restoration, **89%** applied for an invasive/exotic plant removal, **0%** applied for a prescribed burn and **51%** applied for the seeding or planting in their project area.
- The 2006-2007 Massachusetts LIP Projects will conserve 1973-acres of habitat benefiting over **122 At-risk species**.

Understanding the Wildlife Biodiversity of the Commonwealth

(Continued from page 1)

For a small state, Massachusetts has a wide variety of habitats and an impressive array of species inhabiting them. There are coastal dunes and sand plain ponds which are critically important to a number of coastal birds. Various kinds of forest still cover almost three quarters of the state. They include forest types such as pitch pine/scrub oak, hardwoods and white pine stands. Migratory fish populations are being restored in two large river systems, the Merrimack and Connecticut. Overall, some 2000 native vertebrates and vascular plants are known to occur in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts has organized the CWCS around 22 habitat types ranging from landscape scale habitats such as large un-fragmented forests; to midsize habitats like the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers; to small scale habitats such as vernal pools. We have identified 256 animal Species in Greatest Need of Conservation which are linked to these 22 habitats. Our list of Species in Greatest Need of Conservation includes all of the federally listed wildlife species in the state; all of our state special concern, threatened, and endangered wildlife species; wildlife species which are listed as being of regional concern by other resources groups and partnerships; and species which are of management concern within the Commonwealth. This last group includes species which may be in decline, or are felt to be important indicators of the condition of the overall biodiversity of the state.

In addition, a species summary is provided for each of the Species in Greatest Need of Conservation in an appendix. This summary includes our most recent distribution information in map form, along with a life history narrative and key threats facing the species.



The 22 habitat types we have identified in the CWCS have been grouped from a much larger number of natural community types previously identified by the agency. We have made a conscious decision to place similar habitat types under common headings in an effort to simplify a complex landscape so that the users of the CWCS can focus their attention to areas of the state which contain the most important habitat for the species listed as in greatest need of conservation.

How is **LIP** being used to implement the CWCS? Almost 80% of Massachusetts is privately owned. That leaves an important role for the public to play in the conservation of these species and habitats. LIP works with landowners on their property to help with biological expertise and technical support as well as financial support to help with the cost of creating or restoring habitat.

LIP will continue to expand the reaches of the activities conducted on our state properties for wildlife and involve private landowners. LIP's goals address the need for habitat identified in the state's CWCS and with your help, Massachusetts will continue to be a leader in wildlife habitat conservation and restoration.

Faces of Conservation

Sense of Place: K. Weir- *My wife and I daily acknowledge as we walk our land that we have been blessed with the task of stewardship.*

We live on her family farm in Western Massachusetts. The farm is a combination of upland/grassland/riparian habitat. The farm runs from our rolling hay fields, up small ridges through hemlock, white pine, oak and maple, to Poverty Mountain. Our 350 acres was originally part of an 800 acre grant by the King of England to the Adams family, cousins of presidents, in the 1700s.

Over the centuries, the farm became the Adams/Fitts farm, sawmill, and grist mill. Most of the tobacco barns, railroad ties, and library cabinets in the local colleges had their origins in the Fitts sawmill.

My father in law, Walter Banfield, PhD and his wife, Hertha Lang Banfield purchased our 350 acres in 1950. The Banfield family continued to farm the land and had partnerships with local dairy farmers to raise cows, pigs and chickens. Walter hayed the property fields well into his mid 90s.

As with all stories there is also an element of tragedy. My brother in law Walter contracted Hodgkin's disease. We expected him to eventually take over the farm operations and the property. My mother in law, Hertha, died soon after her son. My wife was the last heir to the farm. We were not farmers, loggers, or land owners. So, we convinced her father to apply for an APR grant so that we could afford the cost of inheriting the farm.



Kevin holding a wood turtle on his property

We decided to move to the farm and rebuild the main house. After a time our house was reconstructed and we found ourselves faced with maintaining the land with basically no discretionary money. We had two children about to enter the University of Massachusetts. We had a new mortgage from house repairs. We both had to continue working in jobs outside of our land stewardship activities. So on weekends and late evenings, we taught ourselves how to operate the tractor, back hoe, and brush hog and spent a great deal of our time mowing, clearing the quickly encroaching forest and repairing the deteriorating logging bridges, barns, equipment, and fields.

In an effort to seek any assistance in our efforts, I began to scan the internet seeking resources. One night, about two years ago, I saw the MA Wildlife notice of a "bidder's conference" in Hadley MA for LIP funds.



K. Weir meeting with neighbors to discuss LIP

The grant seemed tailor made for us. Our land was in the APR and forest management program. Our forest management plan was focused on maintaining our property with best practices for wildlife and logging.

We have restricted access to our fields during the nesting season which has led to a major increase in breeding ruffed grouse and woodcock.

Here was an opportunity to improve our efforts with some needed and greatly appreciated help from Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

With the assistance of the LIP website we began taking the whole grant process a step at a time until we had a first draft. I came to know other state, University of MA and federal programs that could offer technical assistance in land management. Invasive plant management and control efforts are supported. With LIP Coordinator Ken MacKenzie's encouragement I found at least two young farmers who were willing to cut my hayfields in exchange for the hay they harvested. I have also bartered the use of our hay barn for future exchange of brush hogging and field maintenance. Most importantly, I have come to know my neighbors with APR rights and large working farms. Ken and John O'Leary came to a meeting with three of these farmers to explain the LIP program and encourage them to apply in the next round of funding next fall.

My first grant is close to completion. As it is, the field that was prepared under the grant is already to the borders and open space that probably existed 100 years ago.

Species of birds that I haven't heard in many years are already starting to use the areas we have managed. I have seen woodcock and grouse as well as hearing bobwhite. On June 10 the Northampton Bird Club visited the site identified 53 species of birds including highlights such as: wood peewees, ovenbirds, black-throated green warblers, black-throated blue warblers, red shouldered hawk, many species of woodpeckers, a veery, red eye vireos, scarlet tanagers, pine warblers, and cedar waxwings.

The LIP program is the answer for those of us laymen with the responsibility of maintaining our lands in partnership with the state wildlife and forest management professionals.

For the complete article and more pictures of Kevin's property please see the September issue of MassWildlife Magazine (See below to find out how to get it!)

Interested in LIP?

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For more Info, log on to:

http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/dfw_lip.htm



MASSACHUSETTS
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Magazine

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

magazine is a quarterly publication packed with award-winning articles and photos on the environment, conservation, fishing, hunting,

natural history and just about everything relating to the outdoors in Massachusetts. Get all the inside information on wildlife and fisheries management, endangered species restoration programs, critical habitat protection and the outstanding people who are working to conserve our outdoor resources. <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/dfwmlwld.htm>